

VZCZCXYZ0018  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSG #1172/01 1501208  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 301208Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9305  
INFO RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 1036  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0957

UNCLAS SANTIAGO 001172

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IIP/G/WHA, INR/R/MR, WHA/BSC, WHA/PDA, INR/IAA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [CI](#) [MX](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION - VENEZUELA'S UNSC CANDIDACY

On May 28, La Tercera (conservative, independent, circ. 102,000) printed an article by political analyst Ascanio Cavallo entitled, "The List with which the White House Awaits the President."

"For her visit to the U.S. President Michelle Bachelet has been invited to stay at Blair House, adjacent to the White House and will have a working lunch with President George Bush followed by a high-level reunion in the Oval Office. Both are courtesies reserved for those the U.S. government considers illustrious guests and are thus considered signs of friendship. But it is possible they will be the only ones, and depending on the evolution of the bilateral dialogue, may become the final ones...

The State Department looked askance at Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' affectionate gestures and jokes with President Bachelet (which they evaluated as an effort at public "patronization," a vitriolic observation for a government so dedicated to restoring the dignity of women). And the State Department likes even less the policy of neutrality and silence that Bachelet announced concerning Chile's South American neighbors.

The U.S. believes that Chile's success in terms of political and economic stability and openness to the world means Chile has a "soft power" it should actively employ as a stabilizing factor in the region. The fact that Santiago has expressly refused to do so signifies for Washington that "irresponsible" governments lack a counterbalance and that its own containment efforts become increasingly difficult.

The Chilean Foreign Ministry apparently believed the explanation that Chile needed to be very prudent because it is situated between sensitive and unstable neighbors who are sometimes jealous of Chile's "success" would be easy to install in Washington, and that the U.S. was over dramatizing the Venezuelan theme.

If that were the case, Foreign Minister Alejandro Foxley would have received the first surprise during his three April meetings with high-ranking officials, when he found that Venezuela has become the central theme on the U.S.-Chile bilateral agenda.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice dedicated an overwhelming

SIPDIS

majority of her meeting with Foxley to only one point: Venezuela's candidacy for the United Nations Security Council. She differentiated the case from any other regional or multilateral decision to the point that she said that its singularity "pointed at the heart of U.S. interests."

According to versions from the Foreign Ministry, Foxley attempted to explain that Chile had to consider its neighbors' opinions and that, in any case, Chile had as yet not made a decision (as Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay--which will vote for Venezuela--seem to have done, with the apparent objective of retaining the energy supply

that Chavez provides).

But the secretary of State was categorical: the U.S. "simply will not understand" a Chilean vote favoring Venezuela for the Security Council. She added that if that were to occur, Chile could end up in a group of losers, against the sentiments of the U.S., Mexico, part of Central America and almost all of Europe.

Rice referred to the decisions that the Security Council may have to take with respect to Iran and underscored the "provocative" friendship that Chavez has developed with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad...

The secretary of State did not even pay much attention to other topics on Foxley's list, such as Chile's favorable position toward the International Criminal Court, which for other countries has signified a restriction in U.S. military cooperation, and an area in which the U.S. could make an exception if Chile were declared a "non-NATO ally"... She also gave short shrift to (talk of) deepening the bilateral free trade agreement (FTA).

The message was that the entire bilateral agenda would be easy if Chile did not vote for Venezuela and very difficult if it did.

The meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick was much worse. Zoellick openly displayed his skepticism with the prudence policy and with what he called--in a mildly ironic tone--the "naive idea" of South American solidarity.

According to the senior official, Chile's silence (which some might interpret as a kind of "shame over its own success," he added) would ultimately distance Chile from the global actors with which it interacts, such as Asia and Europe while paying few dividends among neighbors that are more involved with their internal situations than with international diplomacy.

Zoellick noted that, when he was the U.S. trade representative, he personally urged U.S. President George Bush to move forward on the FTA with Chile despite the fact that Chilean President Ricardo Lagos had recently announced Chile's negative vote on the invasion of Iraq. Bush, with the support of some "hawks" in his administration, had decided to freeze the FTA and Zoellick intervened to illustrate that the damage to the hemisphere would be greater than the punishment to the Chilean government. "This time (the Venezuela case) I would not do the same thing," Zoellick said to Foxley.

The harshest portion of Zoellick's speech came when Foxley told him that the U.S. had to understand that Chile needed to evaluate its Security Council vote by looking at its immediate surroundings. The deputy secretary of State replied that if that reflection led to a vote for Venezuela that the bilateral relationship would be "decisively damaged," that bestowing "non-NATO ally" status would be unviable and that the costs to Chile in terms of security and commercial exchange would be exceedingly high.

Thus, the "broad bilateral agenda" the Chilean government has described to justify President Bachelet's trip could be circumscribed to one point: the ambiguity La Moneda wants to confer upon its relationship with Chavez, to preserve both its autonomy and its regional ties. As tends to occur, the polarization the two principal interested parties--Washington and Caracas--are making that ambiguity increasingly tense.

In the private lunch at the White House, Ministers Foxley and Andres Velasco will accompany President Bachelet. Bush will be surrounded by Secretary Rice, Deputy Secretary Zoellick, Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere Tom Shannon (who was in the Zoellick-Foxley meeting) and the National Security Council's Presidential Advisor Stephen Hadley, who also hosted Foxley in April.

If those in attendance apply even half the pressure Foxley received during his preparatory visit it is a good bet that it will not be a peaceful lunch."

In its May 29 edition, La Tercera published an article entitled, "Government Says it will Not Allow the U.S. to

## Pressure It on the UN Vote"

In the days before the first meeting between Presidents Michelle Bachelet and George Bush...Chilean government Spokesman Ricardo Lagos Weber said that La Moneda would not be pressured by the United States to distance itself from Venezuela, saying "Chile is an honorable country that will not allow itself to be pressured and a country that pursues diplomacy... We are not about pressure. We are about building consensus..."

A month ago during his trip to Washington, Foreign Minister Alejandro Foxley received a direct message from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick...who said that if Santiago were to support Caracas in the vote for a spot on the United Nations Security Council the costs to the relationship

with the U.S. would be "exceedingly high." For her part, Rice was unequivocal in signaling to Foxley that the U.S. government "simply would not understand" a Chilean vote in favor of Hugo Chavez' government.

Chile's support in that vote, which will take place in October, is still undefined. Nevertheless, Minister Lagos Weber signaled yesterday that the government "would always seek a consensus position within Latin America." That could favor Venezuela, considering that various countries in the southern cone have the apparent objective of maintaining the energy supply that Chavez promises.

Foreign Ministry sources admitted the Bush administration was concerned with Chavez' recent signs of closeness with Bachelet at the EU-Latin America Summit in Vienna...

Legislators on the foreign relations committees of both houses shared the posture taken by La Moneda. While Christian Democrat (DC) Senator Jorge Pizarro said that, "U.S. pressure should be of little importance to us," his National Renovation (RN) colleague Sergio Romero added that, "in international relations that type of threat is not used so it surprises me that a foreign minister would say such a thing."

On the other hand, Party for Democracy (PPD) Deputy Jorge Tarud said, "It is natural that countries talk and seek support, thus if Rice asked for support for a candidate, that's fine, she has a right to do so; and Chile is within its rights not to respond."

At the same time, the legislator added that in order to avoid future consequences for the U.S.-Chile relationship "a consensus candidate should be sought." Tarud also defended the secret nature of the vote since it is he noted, "to protect smaller nations from the pressure larger ones apply."

Senator Romero did not share that opinion, saying, "Chile needs to clarify its position, because transparency is necessary in this area, as (the vote) should have been public at the time of the vote in the Commission of Human Rights" of the U.N.

In any case, the RN parliamentarian maintained, "I find it hard to believe Chile would declare itself for Venezuela. I think the more clear line of support is for Brazil, with whom we have a strong ties and a renewed alliance, as Foreign Minister Foxley has noted."

KELLY